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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000739

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SUBJECT: LITHUANIA SEEKING TO EXPAND SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE
FOR AFGHANISTAN PRT

REF: A. VILNIUS 437 B. VILNIUS 483

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SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The GOL recently sponsored a pair of visits between Afghanistan and Lithuania aimed at shoring up support in both countries for its Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Ghor Province, Afghanistan. Ghor's Governor and a delegation of Afghan parliamentarians came to Vilnius for meetings with President Adamkus, Parliamentary Chairman Muntianas, and officials from several ministries. The trip raised local awareness of Lithuania's mission in Afghanistan and was also a way for Lithuania to build bridges to influential MPs in Kabul, who - the Lithuanians believe - pay too little attention to the remote Ghor province. A Lithuanian delegation of government, civil society, and business representatives followed the parliamentarians back to Afghanistan, where they held a series of political meetings in Kabul and visited Ghor province in an effort to raise the PRT's profile in Afghanistan. End Summary.

Shoring up support in Lithuania

¶2. (SBU) Both the Afghans' visit to Lithuania and the Lithuanians' trip to Afghanistan received broad press coverage in Lithuania. The delegation head, former Lithuanian Ambassador to NATO Ginte Damusis, effectively managed press coverage to focus positively on what Lithuania was doing in Ghor province and Afghanistan's need for assistance. Press conferences followed the Afghan delegation's meetings with President Adamkus and Parliamentary Chairman Victor Muntianas, as well as officials in the defense, interior, and economy ministries.

Seeking more cash

¶3. (SBU) Damusis told the press that the MFA would seek a five-fold budget increase, from one million litas to five (370,000 to 1.85 million USD), for Lithuania's assistance to Afghanistan. The MFA's request ultimately will rely on the Prime Minister's and Seimas's approval, but Damusis told us that she wanted to use the visits to get the request out publicly in order to bolster public support.

Trying to raise Ghor's profile on the ground

¶4. (SBU) Damusis told us that the objectives of the delegation's visit to Afghanistan were to raise the PRT's profile in Afghanistan and to attract more support from government structures and NGOs operating elsewhere in Afghanistan. She said that Ghor's isolation and the lack of media outlets there meant that few in Afghanistan knew about the PRT's activities. To address these concerns, the Head of Lithuania's special mission in Ghor, Ambassador Serksnys, will establish a part-time residence in Kabul where he has better access to NGOs, Afghan politicians, and, apparently, Ghor's Governor who Damusis said spends the majority of his time there.

¶5. (SBU) Damusis characterized the visits as successful, saying that the parliamentarians have already begun to pay more attention to Ghor than before the visits. NGO activity has been harder to encourage, she said, due to the cost of working in Ghor and the still-unstable security situation. She pointed to the deaths in Ghor of four NGO workers in two separate incidents while she was in Afghanistan, although she said it was not yet clear if they had been targeted for their affiliations, or merely the victims of ordinary crime.

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Finding visible assistance projects

¶6. (SBU) Lithuania's primary goal remains security sector reform, but Damusis's delegation sought to determine other assistance projects that would have more visible impact on local communities' infrastructure. She explained that the complete lack of media coverage in Ghor means that the GOL gets very little recognition for its important, but less visible, work there. In response to appeals from the Ghor Governor's office, Lithuania plans to build micro-hydroelectricity plants to serve small communities. Lithuania is also considering building a police headquarters building.

¶7. (SBU) Two representatives of Lithuanian NGOs accompanied the delegation to explore options to give on-the-ground training in the fields of health and education, possibly including training midwives. Another project will bring physicians from Ghor to work and study in Kaunas University Hospital. A Lithuanian business representative also accompanied the delegation to explore business opportunities in Afghanistan (reported septel).

Still trying to improve police project

18. (SBU) Improvement of the security sector remains Lithuania's primary assistance goal, said Damusis. She said that Lithuania will spend one-third of its assistance budget in Afghanistan (300,000 litas - about USD 110,000) to train the Afghan National police and donate vehicles, radio sets, and basic police equipment. Lithuania intends to send another Lithuanian police advisor to Ghor and again asked about the possibility of the USG returning the American police advisors who had been working in Ghor until April 2006 (ref A). Lithuania is also trying to attract police trainers from other countries. Damusis told us that she has been in talks with Ukraine and Latvia about sending a civilian contingent of police trainers to the Ghor PRT (ref B).

Comment

19. (SBU) Visits like these, which aim at reinforcing support for the PRT inside Lithuania while building ties with politicians in Kabul, show that Lithuania is looking after the long-term success of its mission in Afghanistan. The MFA's request for a dramatic increase in assistance just as Lithuania faces the prospects of taking over the costs of the military mission in January 2007 is a positive sign that the GOL remains committed to its mission in Ghor.
KELLY